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THE STATE HERMITAGE MUSEUM AND ITS ARCHITECTURE

MICHAEL FORSYTH & MARION HARNEY



The immense complex of the flamboyant baroque Winter Palace, with extensions to house Catherine the Great’s collections, and a classical, academically-correct 19th century purpose-built museum together form the core of The State Hermitage Museum. One of the great museums of the world, the ensemble of buildings forms a rich backdrop to the collections. It is like an immense, ever-changing operatic stage design that sets the scene for the performers. But while in an opera house the scenes change before a static audience, here the visitor experiences a rewarding, dynamic, sequential progression of spaces, a kinetic architectural experience as remarkable as the collections themselves.

The interconnected buildings comprise the former imperial Winter Palace, built around a courtyard with state rooms on the *piano nobile*, the Small Hermitage, a narrow building extending the depth of the Winter Palace, the Old and New Hermitage to the east and the Hermitage Theatre, which links to the other buildings across the Winter Canal. The Old Hermitage occupies the northern section along the river, built in 1771–87, and a southern section, the New Hermitage, was the first purpose-built public museum in Russia. Today, the restored palace and the museum are one and the same, forming part of the complex of buildings housing The State Hermitage Museum.

The Winter Palace was from the start the centrepiece of St Petersburg, the new capital city of the Russian Empire, officially founded by Peter the Great on 27 May 1703. Located on the banks of the river Neva, St Petersburg sprang from a swampy marsh on the eastern shore of the Gulf of Finland. From the outset it was conceived as a defensive position and his window on the West – a crossroads linking Europe and Asia – the intersection of eastern and western

commerce. Built on a regular plan there was no equivalent in western urbanism at the time. The city today is a remarkably harmonious assemblage of baroque, rococo, neoclassical and art nouveau that evolved over two centuries. Its architectural history can neatly be divided into reigns with each change of ruler accompanied by a change of style reflecting the taste of Peter the Great and that of his successors. The foreign architects who worked in St Petersburg, including on The State Hermitage Museum, were invited, not because of their nationality, but because of their expertise and high status in their homelands. The city’s name was changed twice, to Petrograd in 1914 and Leningrad in 1924, then back to St Petersburg in 1991. As the imperial capital of Russia, it was the seat of government from 1713 to 1918, after which the central government bodies reverted to Moscow. The historic city centre and the palaces in its environs were added to UNESCO’s World Heritage List in 1990.

The present Winter Palace overlooks the immense Palace Square, laid out to the design of Yury Matveyevich Felten (1730–1801) following a competition held by the Academy of Fine Arts in 1779. Felten was born Georg Veldten into a family of German immigrants and had worked from 1752–1762 as assistant during the construction of the Winter Palace. The urban square has unparalleled scale and majesty, a triumphal classical conception. From 1819 the site was modified with the construction of new offices along its periphery for Russia’s main government agencies – the General Staff, the Finance Ministry and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The principal architect was Carlo di Giovanni Rossi (1775–1849), an Italian who worked the major portion of his life in Russia and was responsible for the architectural rigour and coherence of many of the city’s streets and squares. Rossi’s General Staff

building, built 1819–1828, defines an enormous concave open area facing the Winter Palace with a monumental double arch forming a triumphal ceremonial approach from Nevsky Prospekt, St Petersburg’s main thoroughfare. The archway is crowned by a bronze chariot pulled by six horses (in Latin, a *seiuga*), bearing a winged figure of Glory. Carlo Rossi imagined a gigantic column in the centre of the square and this vision was fulfilled when the colossal 47.5m (154 ft) Alexander I Column, dedicated to his victory over Napoleon, was erected in 1829–34 by the French neoclassical architect Auguste de Montferrand (1786–1858), designer of St Isaac’s Cathedral. In 1837–43 on the east side of the square Alexander Pavlovich Briullov (1798–1877) built the General Staff Headquarters for the Guard. The square today still reflects Ross’s original intentions.

THE WINTER PALACE

The Winter Palace derives its name from being the winter residence of the imperial family. The original residence was a log cabin built for Emperor Peter the Great painted to resemble brick. It was built on its present location on the Petrogradskaya Embankment on 24–26 May 1703. The wooden ‘Small winter mansion of Peter I’ was built in 1708 on the site of the present Hermitage Theatre, closer to its southern border, presumably by Domenico Trezzini. In 1711 it was relocated to the Petrovsky Island and was dismantled in the 18th century. The stone Peter I’s ‘Wedding Palace’ was built in 1711–12, presumably by Domenico Trezzini and dismantled in 1726. The second Winter Palace by Georg Johann Mattarnovi, a German baroque architect and sculptor, was built in 1716–22 in several stages. Peter the Great died here in 1725. Empress Anna Ioannovna was the first of Peter’s descendants to rebuild the palace once again. In 1731, she commissioned Francesco Bartolomeo Rastrelli (1700–1771), a French-born Russian-Italian who had been appointed senior court architect in 1730, to design a larger, third Winter Palace on the site, and this was completed in 1735. It served for only 17 years before Rastrelli was commissioned, this time by Empress Elizabeth Petrovna, to extend the existing building. After two years proposing alternative designs Rastrelli eventually decided to completely rebuild the palace, and his new design was approved by the empress in 1754 and took eight years to build. This final incarnation was the fourth and present Winter Palace.

Elizabeth, who pursued her father, Peter’s dream of a ‘New Rome’, gave Rastrelli a largely free-hand to fulfil his architectural projects and he was responsible for all the major works undertaken in and around the capital until her death. His style suited Elizabeth’s taste for opulence, and particularly for gilded interiors. Rastrelli by now had developed in his work an easily recognizable style of late baroque that became the style of Russian architecture in the mid-18th century. His architecture is notable for the richness and profusion of decorative detailing and his use of brilliant colour. At the Winter Palace groups of columns arranged across the façade create a lively rhythm and sense of movement. The variety of decorative detailing, varied window treatments with capricious little pediments, richness of sculptured finials, all combine to create a unique decorative scheme of ornamental abundance, heightened still further by the use of white columns and surrounds against colourful stucco. And because all kinds of festivities took place in and around the palace, this helped solidify its presence not

only as a dwelling place for the imperial family, but also as an important symbol and memorial to the Russian state.

Three façades of Rastrelli’s grandiose palace face the Neva, the adjacent Admiralty and Palace Square respectively. The fourth façade is contiguous to the buildings of the Hermitage. The Winter Palace presents to Palace Square an expansive façade, two-storeys with a *piano nobile* above a ground storey punctuated with Roman Ionic columns. The upper storeys are defined by giant order Roman Corinthian columns. There are 51 bays with a projecting centre of 17 bays with a pediment flanked by broken segmental pediments, and this centre section is flanked by nine-bay projecting pavilions. The windows have triangular, segmental and swan-neck pediments with grotesque masks. The surrounds are white against a vivid green stucco ground (in the 18th century the colour was sandy yellow). The cornice is crowned by balustrading surmounted with finials of figures and vases. Set back to one side a gilded onion dome marks the Great Church.

A serious fire in 1837 left the exterior intact but destroyed much of the interior of the palace. Rebuilding commenced immediately and large parts were reconstructed in a variety of striking, largely classical styles. There are splendid and bold parquet floors throughout displaying palmettes, garlands of husks, Greek key designs and other classical motifs. One of the principal architects who undertook the rebuilding was Alexander Briullov, artist and architect, who was born in St Petersburg into a family of French artists. Other architects included Vasily Petrovich Stasov (1769–1848) and Andrei Ivanovich Stakensneider (1802–1865).

Inside the palace, off the main entrance is THE JORDAN GALLERY (known in the 18th century as the Main Gallery) with, beyond, THE JORDAN STAIRCASE, marble and magnificent, both by Rastrelli and restored by Stasov. The staircase is named after the annual Jordan Festival, when the imperial family descended the stairs at Epiphany to take part in the annual ‘Blessing of the Waters’ of the Neva, and was used by foreign ambassadors presenting their credentials. The staircase is lit by windows on the north side and the opposite wall is mirrored. The walls have gilded mouldings and display allegorical sculptures. Two broad flights terminate with a landing behind a colonnade of paired columns of grey granite (Rastrelli’s wooden columns were finished in stucco and painted pink). The ceiling painting depicts Olympus.

Extending to the west from the top of the staircase on the *piano nobile* is the Neva Enfilade, grand rooms originally built in 1791–93 by Giacomo Quarenghi (1744–1817), who became the foremost and most prolific Palladian architect in Russia, and redesigned by Vasily Stasov. The rooms were built for official ceremonies and the great winter-season imperial balls. They are decorated in tones of white artificial marble lit by crystal chandeliers that formed a neutral backdrop to the glamorous costumes and official uniforms of the guests. First is THE AVANT-SALLE, large, square and simply-decorated where champagne was served as up to 5000 guests passed through to assemble in THE NICHOLAS HALL, centred on the palace and lined with Corinthian columns supporting a moulded entablature. It is named after Nicholas I whose portrait was hung here after his death in 1855. The enfilade concludes with THE CONCERT HALL, where smaller imperial balls were held.

Paired Corinthian columns support a cornice surmounted by sculptures of the ancient muses and the goddess Flora, with clerestory windows in between. A vast silver reliquary of St Alexander Nevsky is housed here, originally commissioned by Empress Elizabeth Petrovna and transferred to the State Hermitage from the Alexander Nevsky Monastery in 1922. The corridor extending the length of the Neva Enfilade on the courtyard side is THE PORTRAIT GALLERY OF THE HOUSE OF THE ROMANOVs. Beyond, to the west THE ROTUNDA, by Auguste de Montferrand and redesigned by Alexander Briullov, is domed and galleried and was originally hung with portraits of Russian rulers. Adjacent, north, backing on to the Concert Hall is THE MOORISH DINING ROOM of 1838–39 by Briullov. Overlooking the Neva and connected to the Concert Hall is THE MALACHITE DAWING ROOM, smaller and more intimate, also by Briullov. With a coved and gilded ceiling, it is richly decorated with pilasters and free-standing Corinthian columns clad in vibrant malachite, the lustrous green mineral extracted in the Urals. The chimney-pieces, with gilded over-mantel mirrors, are also malachite and the room houses a superb malachite amphora vase. Adjacent is THE SMALL DINING ROOM, decorated in white neo-rococo in 1894–95 by the palace architect Alexander Krasovsky (1848–1918). Here, on the night of 25 October 1917 ministers in the Provisional Government of Alexander Fyodorovich Kerensky (1881–1970) were arrested.

The private apartments extending around the north-west corner from the Malachite Hall were originally designed by Briullov and Stakenschneider for Empress Alexandra Fyodorovna, wife of Nicholas I but adapted for the last Imperial family. Notable is THE LIBRARY OF NICHOLAS II of 1894–95 by Alexander Krasovsky (1848–1918). The double-height square-plan space is in English Gothic style, with tall tracery windows, glazed Gothic bookcases, a gallery with trefoil balustrading supported by trefoil-pierced brackets accessed by a prominent staircase. A stone chimneypiece bears armorial shields in over-mantel panels and the walnut ceiling is coffered. The west wing south of the Library contains a range of smaller rooms that overlook the courtyard to the east and the Admiralty to the west. These were the private apartments created by Briullov in time for the wedding in 1841 of the future Emperor Alexander II and his wife Maria Alexandrovna (1824–80). In the suite of rooms in the southwest corner used by the Empress, THE BOUDOIR of 1853 was designed in elegant second-rococo style by the architect Harald Julius von Bosse (1812–1894). Red silk brocatelle wall hangings and mirrors, delicate gilded mouldings and upholstered furniture provide a sense of intimate opulence. Opposite the window wall female term figures support an arch that defines a raised seating alcove. Adjacent, THE CRIMSON DRAWING ROOM, with additional decoration by Andrei Stakenschneider in 1853, has windows on two sides with rich drapes and pelmets. This links with, in the southwest corner, THE GOLD DRAWING ROOM, further embellished in the 1840s by Stakenschneider and by Vladimir Schreiber in the 1850s. The room is one of the most exuberantly decorated in the palace, with extensive gilding including the doors and vaulted ceiling. The marble chimneypiece, supported by terms, has a mosaic panel by Etienne Moderni and an over-mantel with jasper columns. Centred at the southern end of the west wing is THE WHITE HALL, designed by Alexander Briullov on the model of a Roman bath, another of the suite of rooms for the wedding of the future Emperor Alexander II. Corinthian

columns support a cornice surmounted by figures representing the arts, from which springs a richly-modelled barrel-vaulted ceiling with lunettes. The room displays classical-style furniture by the cabinet-maker David Roentgen (1743–1807). THE ROOM OF BRITISH ART is decorated in English neoclassical style with a shallow-vaulted ceiling and painted trellis. The south side of the Winter Palace contained a suite of five Rooms of War Paintings designed by Briullov to commemorate Russian victories in the period before the Patriotic War of 1812. The central vaulted hall, one of THE ROOMS OF FRENCH ART OF THE 18TH CENTURY displays sculpture and painting of the 1730–60s. The principal room east concluding the south wing, THE ALEXANDER HALL, also by Briullov, commemorates Emperor Alexander I and the Russian victory over the French after the invasion of Russia in the Patriotic War of 1812. The room is a fusion of Gothic and classical style with cluster columns with Romanov double-headed eagles in the capitals, from which spring implied fan vaulting. Twenty-four large medallions in the frieze reproduce medals by the sculptor Count Fiodor Tolstoi that depict events of the war and the subsequent foreign campaigns of 1813–14 that led to Napoleon’s defeat.

The east wing of the Winter Palace, extending south from the Jordan staircase, comprises the Great Suite of State Rooms. First is THE FIELD MARSHALS’ HALL, 1833–34, designed by Auguste de Montferrand and restored to his design by Vasily Stasov. The pearly-white room has portals of double Greek Ionic columns and pairs of Ionic pilasters support an entablature with a gallery above. In between are portraits of Russian field marshals. It was here that the fire of 1837 started. Next, apsidal-ended, THE PETER THE GREAT ROOM, created in 1833 by de Montferrand. The centre-piece of the Great Suite of State Rooms is THE ARMORIAL HALL, built for grand receptions by Stasov in the late 1830s. Sculpted Russian warriors flank the doorways, formerly bearing armorial shields depicting Russian provinces that gave the room its name. Pairs of gilded Corinthian columns and pilasters on plinths support a galleried cornice. Parallel with the Armorial Hall, THE WAR GALLERY OF 1812, designed by Carlo Rossi, and finished in 1826, commemorates Russia’s victory over the French. The walls are hung with 332 small portraits of Russian generals painted by the fashionable English portrait painter George Dawe (1781–1829), some with the assistance of his pupils, Wilhelm Golike (d.1848) and Alexander Poliakov (1801–1835). These flank monumental portraits of allied rulers from the European campaigns of 1813–14. Centred on this and the Armorial Hall, THE ST GEORGE HALL, an extension east of the original Winter Palace, was completed in the early 1840s by Stasov after the original by Giacomo Quarenghi, built for the great occasions of state. Paired Carrara marble columns flank arched windows with clerestory windows above and at one end is the great imperial throne made in London in 1731–32 by the Huguenot Nicholas Clausen. Above the throne dais is a bas-relief of St George slaying the dragon. THE PICKET ROOM, concluding the sequence and named after the sentries or ‘pickets’ that were stationed here, has relief panels between pilasters and a broad frieze depicting military motifs. Off to the east the Imperial family’s former GREAT CHURCH OF THE WINTER PALACE was the centre of court ceremony. The baroque interior, with gilded columns and mouldings, was designed by Rastrelli in 1753–62 and rebuilt in replica by Stasov.

THE SMALL HERMITAGE

The next phase of building was THE SMALL HERMITAGE. Empress Catherine II (the Great) (1729–96) brought a new style of architecture, introducing neoclassicism to St Petersburg through harking back to antiquity as the style promoted during Elizabeth’s rule did not remotely suit her. In 1764, the Empress commissioned Yury Felten to build an extension on the south-east side of the Winter Palace. This he completed in 1766 as her retreat. Later the extension became the Southern Pavilion of the Small Hermitage, for, in 1767–1769, the French architect Jean-Baptiste Vallin de la Mothe (1729–1800) built a northern pavilion on the Neva embankment and between 1767 and 1775 the extensions were connected by galleries in which Catherine housed her expanding collections. The entire neoclassical building is now known as the Small Hermitage. The interiors were extensively altered by Stasov and Stakenschneider in the 1840s and 1850s. The ground floor of the Small Hermitage used to house the palace stables and riding school.

On the first floor, the principal room is the white PAVILION HALL at the north end, designed and built by Stakenschneider in 1850–58. The decoration is modelled after the description of an Oriental salon in Alexander Pushkin’s poem the *Fountain of Bakhchisarai*. The double-height room is spatially complex and divided by a central colonnade of double fluted Corinthian columns and colonnades at either end further divide the space. Galleries around the walls are screened by delicate colonnades with pierced balcony fronts that give the room an Islamic flavour. The hall is lit by windows overlooking the Neva on one side and on the other, the Hanging Garden created in Catherine’s time. Daylight reflects from the white marble surfaces and gilded mouldings and in the crystals of splendid chandeliers. On the east side a columned apsidal niche is flanked by a fountain of scallop shells inspired by the Fountain of Tears at the Bakhchisarai Palace in the Crimea. On the west side a spatially complex marble staircase leading to the gallery is flanked by two further identical fountains. Before French doors leading to a Hanging Garden is a mosaic floor panel copied from a Roman thermae, and on the Neva side is the famous Peacock Clock by James Cox, which entered the Hermitage in 1797 from the Tauride Palace.

THE OLD HERMITAGE

In 1771 Catherine II commissioned Yury Felten to build another extension along the river in neoclassical style to house her ever-expanding collection of pictures and objects. The building was completed in 1787. This extension is known as THE OLD HERMITAGE and Felten and Quarenghi designed the interiors but these were replaced by Stakenschneider in 1851–60. Some 80 years after Catherine II commissioned the extension, Emperor Nicholas I (1796–1855) added a major attached building on the south side, THE NEW HERMITAGE, built in 1838–1852 as Russia’s first purpose-built public art gallery. The architect was the eminent German Greek revivalist, Leo von Klenze (1784–1864), designer of the Glyptothek and Alte Pinakotek in Munich. Von Klenze’s interiors have all survived.

The Pavilion Hall links directly with the Old Hermitage. In the north-west corner THE COUNCIL STAIRCASE designed by Andrei Stakenschneider in the mid-19th century is named after the State Council offices located on the

ground floor at that time. Within a hall with restrained white-and-pink marble decoration a splendid double-flight cantilevered stair ascends to a double-height landing with fluted Corinthian columns, panelled pilasters and bold foliate ironwork balustrading. A prominent landing over the stairs displays an immense Yekaterinburg malachite vase of the 1850s. Beyond an enfilade of smaller rooms overlooking the Neva, THE LEONARDO DA VINCI HALL was richly decorated by Stackenschneider in 1858–60, and is named after the two works by the Renaissance master that are housed here. Large windows overlook the river with clerestory windows above. Arranged around the room are fluted jasper Corinthian columns and pilasters on porphyry pedestals with ormolu mounts, and above the cornice terms support the ceiling beams. At either end chimneypieces have overmantles with marble Corinthian columns supporting broken segmental pediments. The doors are decorated with brass and paste inlay work. Adjacent, overlooking the courtyard, THE TITIAN ROOM, dedicated to displaying later works by the Venetian Renaissance master (1488–1576), was also decorated by Stackenschneider in the 1850s and restored in 2003 to the original deep red scheme.

THE HERMITAGE THEATRE

At the north east corner of the Old Hermitage, The Hermitage Theatre is accessed by a foyer which spans the Winter Canal at the junction with the Neva embankment. It was designed by Felten in 1783, and embellished in elegant French rococo style in 1902–04 by Leon Benois (1856–1928). The intimate 200-seat court HERMITAGE THEATRE by Giacomo Quarenghi was built 1783–89 on the site of the old Winter Palace. The charming design was based on current French neoclassical thinking, using pure-geometry semi-circular classical amphitheatre seating, with six rows of rising semi-circular benches and a broad centre aisle. Around the auditorium are imitation marble Corinthian columns with capitals that incorporate theatrical masks. In between, round-headed alcoves contain plaster sculptures of the nine muses and Apollo and above are panels with medallions depicting eminent playwrights. The walls, too, are clad in imitation marble. It is the only surviving 18th century theatre in St Petersburg. Quarenghi’s designs were engraved and published in 1787, giving him a European reputation.

THE NEW HERMITAGE

Built in 1838–52, Leo von Klenze’s New Hermitage was ceremoniously opened to the public as the Imperial Museum on 5 February 1852, remaining until the October revolution in 1917. The building works were supervised by the Construction Committee which included leading architects and engineers of St Petersburg including Vasily Stasov and Alexander Briullov. The Academician Nikolai Yefimov was in overall charge of the construction. The neoclassical Greek revival composition is restrained and academically correct. It has two-storeys flanked by projecting three-storey wings, for which existing buildings on the site were demolished. Illustrious figures occupy aedicules on the ground floor and the upper floor windows have stylised female terms in the central mullions. A monumental, prominent and very muscular portico, marking the original public entrance to von Klenze’s Imperial Museum is supported by ten giant 5m (16ft) high granite Atlas’s, a masculine echo of the feminine Erechtheum, Athens. Greek

decoration of wreaths, derived from the Choragic Monument of Thrasyllus in Athens, anthemia, acroteria and other motifs decorate the façade.

The Greek revival interiors are entirely clad in coloured and polished panels of artificial marble. Next to the majestic staircase hall, THE DIONYSUS HALL contains classical Roman sculpture strikingly displayed against a backdrop of dark red artificial marble. Next, THE ANCIENT ROMAN COURTYARD represents the atrium of a wealthy Roman villa with eight Carrara marble Corinthian columns that imitate the peristyle. The apsidal end to the room leads to THE JUPITER HALL, the principal room on the west side of the New Hermitage. This is named after a giant late 1st-century sculpture of Jupiter from the suburban villa of Emperor Domitian. The walls are clad with green artificial marble and it is vaulted with high-level Diocletian windows, giving the room a subterranean feel. The vast jasper Kolyvan Vase was placed in the middle of THE ROOM OF THE KOLYVAN VASE before construction began and the walls, clad in artificial marble, were built around it. The room is vaulted with decorative plasterwork, and white marble Grecian Ionic columns form arched loggias. The vase, 2.57m (8ft 5in) high and weighing 19 tonnes, was designed by the architect Abraham Melnikov (1784–1854) and was finished in 1843 at the Kolyvan Lapidary Works in Western Siberia and finally moved to the New Hermitage in 1850. THE TWENTY-COLUMN HALL is dominated by two lines of monolithic columns of grey Serdobol granite from Finland, forming three aisles. The Greek Ionic capitals are painted in the antique manner and the ceiling beams and coffers are profusely decorated with anthemia and other classical motifs. The boldly-patterned stone mosaic floor was created at the Peterhof Lapidary Works. THE HERCULES HALL on the east side of the New Hermitage, with a delicately-painted vaulted ceiling, contains Roman copies of the work of the Greek 4th century BC sculptors, Praxiteles, Scopas and Lysippos. THE ATHENA HALL in the south east corner of the New Hermitage has pilasters and six monolithic columns of Serdobol granite, and a fine mosaic floor. THE HALL OF ARCHAIC AND EARLY CLASSICAL ART, with a delicately-painted groin-vaulted ceiling, richly-coloured imitation polished marble walls and chequer-board floor, displays Greek art of the Archaic and Early Classical periods.

THE MAIN STAIRCASE rises majestically from the entrance hall flanked by walls of polished stucco representing Siena marble to THE UPPER LANDING, with two rows of ten grey granite columns and superb foliate ironwork railings. The transverse wing of the New Hermitage immediately beyond the staircase is entered through THE GALLERY OF THE HISTORY OF ANCIENT PAINTING, intended by von Klenze as a prelude to the picture galleries of the Imperial Museum. Nine bays with domes and pendentives contain 80 delightful wall panels by Georg Hiltensperger (1806–90) remind visitors of the origin of different types of classical Greek art. The gallery displays neoclassical sculptures by Antonio Canova (1757–1822) and his followers.

Beyond, THE LARGE ITALIAN SKYLIGHT HALL and adjacent, THE SMALL ITALIAN SKYLIGHT HALL are grand and top-lit with richly-moulded vaulted ceilings embellished with Arabesque reliefs. These display large 16th–18th century Italian paintings and in the centre are splendid malachite and lapis lazuli vases and tables with gilded decoration. The furniture was designed by Carlo Rossi around 1819. To the north, replacing the east wing of the Old

Hermitage, THE MAJOLICA ROOM, Renaissance-style, is entered through an apse with a portal of double Ionic columns and winged caryatids supporting a pediment. Above the cornice pairs of gilded figures support an implied entablature. The coffered ceiling is reflected in the floor pattern. THE ITALIAN CABINET is a delightful intimate, apsidal room with frescoes depicting Venus, the goddess of love, replicated from a villa on Rome’s Palatine Hill (school of Raphael, late 1510s). The room displays one of the State Hermitage’s masterpieces, Michelangelo’s sculpture of a Crouching Boy. East of The Small Italian Skylight Hall overlooking the Winter Canal is THE RAPHAEL LOGGIA, originally built by Quarenghi, 1778–85, for Catherine II. This is a copy of the gallery of the same name in the Vatican with frescoes designed by Raphael. These were reproduced here on canvases by the Tyrolese Christopher Unterberger (1732–93) and his workshop. During the building of the New Hermitage in 1841–51 the canvases were removed and re-attached when the work was finished. The Loggias are divided into 13 arched bays, each bay with a coved painted ceiling, windows and a corresponding mirrored wall. THE KNIGHTS’ HALL on the east side of the New Hermitage, richly decorated with ornamental painting in the neo-Grecian style, originally designed for the display of coins, houses part of the State Hermitage’s rich and vast collection of arms and armour. At the south east corner THE LOBBY (OR VESTIBULE) is dominated by the severe grey granite Greek Ionic columns, set against the polished golden hues of the walls. From here, the series of rooms along the south side of the first floor display works by the great Dutch and Flemish artists. THE SNYDERS ROOM presents works by 17th-century Flemish artists including Frans Snyders’s paintings of ‘shops’. The central gallery, THE VAN DYCK ROOM, with Roman Ionic columns and a deeply-coffered ceiling, displays portraits by the leading court painter in England, the Flemish baroque artist Sir Anthony van Dyck (1599–1641). THE RUBENS ROOM, also with a deeply-coffered ceiling, presents the collection of works by the great Flemish artist Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640). THE JORDAENS ROOM in the south west corner of the New Hermitage, square in plan with an apse, illustrates the formation of the Dutch and Flemish schools including paintings by Jan Breughel the Elder and David Teniers. The display of the Dutch and Flemish schools continues in THE TENT-ROOFED ROOM, so-called because of the unusual gabled ceiling. The double windows are pedimented with acroteria. The artists represented here include Jacob van Ruisdael, Jan Steen, Pieter de Hooch and Frans Hals. THE SPANISH SKYLIGHT HALL has a vaulted ceiling embellished with gilded Arabesque reliefs and a frieze contains medallions with portraits of famous Dutch, Flemish and German artists and other architectural subjects. Works of Spanish masters are displayed, together with a vase and torchères of ormolu-mounted Korgon porphyry. This is the last of the three large top-lit rooms in von Klenze’s New Hermitage and so the route returns to the main staircase landing.

A PHOTOGRAPHIC JOURNEY IN THE STATE HERMITAGE MUSEUM

WITH AHMET ERTUĞ

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